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ABSTRACT

This document contains a symposium paper on human resource development (HRD). "Human Resource Development Research: Is Anyone Listening?" (Gary N. McLean), discusses the following: discrepancies between HRD "best practices" described in the HRD research and those found in business; the causes of the "disconnect" that exists between researchers and practitioners at several levels; and strategies that HRD practitioners, organizations, and the business community can use to improve connections between researchers and practitioners (including research-business partnerships, identify creative funding approaches to enhance funding available for HRD research, have professional HRD organizations assume more responsibility for creating bridging opportunities, make greater use of electronic media to disseminate research findings, use cost-benefit analysis to evaluate research proposals; and provide HRD practitioners with coursework in research). (MN)

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HRD Town Forum - An AHRD Tradition

HRD Research: Is Anyone Listening?
Gary N. McLean, Univ. of Minnesota
Integrating the Art and Science of HRD
Michael Leimbach, Wilson Learning Corp., AHRD Global 100 member

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Human Resource Development Research: Is Anyone Listening?

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Discrepancies between HRD "best practices" as described in research and those found in business suggest that there is a disconnect between researchers and practitioners. Systemically, the problem exists at several levels: researchers and their work contexts, dissemination modes (journals, conferences, electronic modes, and academic consultants), and practitioners and their organizational contexts. An open-ended question to practitioners, personal experiences, and literature identified reasons for the disconnect. Recommendations are made for improving connections.

A quick review of current issues in any popular business journal or magazine will reveal a number of "hot" topics that are related to human resource development: re-engineering, downsizing, chaos theory, 360-degree feedback or upward appraisal, organizational learning, systems thinking, large scale experiences, TQM/CQI, goal setting, vision and mission statements, values statements, distance learning, and on and on the list could go. Businesses switch so quickly from one current fad to another that employees understand well the concept of "flavor/fad of the month." They know that they don't have to take the latest emphasis seriously; if they just outwait it, it will disappear.

Research tells us that there are three ways to respond to each of these practices:

- Some are appropriate and desirable, if used correctly.
- Some are inappropriate and even harmful, especially if not used correctly.
- And for some, the research just doesn't tell us yet whether the practice is appropriate or not, or when, where, and how it is appropriate. We just don't know.

Given that the research does tell us something about some of these practices, and given that research recommendations often seem to be ignored by business practice, why doesn't business pay more attention to the research findings? And there is also the flip side. Research tells us, for example, that expatriate and cross-cultural training are essential in companies seeking globalization, and that organization development is far more effective than training for diversity. Yet these findings are likewise overlooked by most businesses, in spite of the clear evidence of research.

A Systemic View of the Problem

It has been easy for researchers to blame practitioners for not paying more attention to the research in determining "best practices," just as it has been easy for practitioners to disregard researchers for a host of reasons. But neither view is correct. Using systems thinking, it becomes obvious that there are multiple sources of problems that must be addressed if we are to hope for open communication between researchers and practitioners of human resource development. As Susan DeVogel, a PhD consultant in organization development, said, "Knowledge doesn't get disseminated effectively to the practitioner, the practitioners aren't keeping up, and, even if they did, their customers aren't terribly interested."

On the production side, the researchers themselves bear some responsibility, as do the organizations in which they work and the contexts that they provide. Given that most of the research in human resource development is conducted by academics, the organizational contexts

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are most often universities. To a much lesser degree, we find some research conducted by consultants (who are not employed primarily in universities) and, to an almost minuscule extent, practitioner scholars.

On the consumer side, other than other academics, at least one intended consumer is probably the HRD practitioner, though the desired consumer may well be executives or operational managers. As with researchers, these personnel also function within organizational contexts. While these organizations can be of almost any type, including governmental and not-for-profit, the focus is often directed towards for-profit businesses, usually medium- to large-sized.

While these are usually the two foci of the discussion, the dissemination tools that are intended to bridge producers and consumers also bear responsibility. Traditionally, journals have been the primary source for disseminating research information to the field. But there have always been two types of journals: those intended primarily for a scholarly audience (the so-called refereed journals) and those intended primarily for a user audience (the so-called trade journals). Two other dissemination sources have also been common--conferences (also scholarly- and practitioner-oriented) and the consulting work of the researcher, who, hopefully, is able to transfer research findings into practice through the consulting role. Fourth, a rapidly emerging dissemination source is, of course, electronic media--primarily the internet, including the use of Web pages, e-mail, listservs, chat rooms, and video cameras installed on computers, but also including teleconferencing.

In the remainder of this paper, each of the components in the research-to-application continuum will be examined to determine what causes dysfunction to occur. Methods used in determining the sources will first be described. Suggestions will also be made in each area to suggest how a functional theory-to-practice continuum can be created.

Methodology

There is no pretense of this being a formal research study; after all, if it were, no one would listen. Unfortunately, however, I have enough research blood in me that I couldn't completely ignore all of my training. So, in addition to a cursory literature review, a brief, open-ended question was sent to twenty consultant and in-house practitioners asking them: "Why are HRD best practices, as identified through academic research, so often ignored by practitioners?" Twelve responded. Their comments, with attribution, when permission was given, are incorporated into the literature and into my own personal observations.

Causes of Dysfunctional Communication in Research

Within the research-to-practice continuum, each component of the system bears some responsibility for the dysfunctional communication that occurs between researchers and practitioners in preventing the application of practices in organizations that are congruent with research.

Research Context As indicated earlier, the context for most researchers in human resource development resides within the university. Research, therefore, is often impacted by the culture of this context. The characteristics of this context that impact negatively on the results of such research include:

Publish or perish! Motives are important. Why one does what one does often influences who it impacts and how much. Academia, through its reward systems, focuses more on number of publications and grant funding than on impact. As a result, researchers, responding to this system, are less concerned about communicating with practitioners, and thus affecting practice, than they are in accumulating the "green stamps" (or today it would be frequent buyer points on their gold card).

Disparaging of hands-on research and dissemination. The flip side of the preceding point is that the reward systems of academia view with skepticism, if not disgust, action research and other paradigms for knowledge acquisition that require the academic to get his or her hands dirty. Even such significant contributions to knowledge as editorships of major journals, at least in HRD, and "translating" one's research into lay language and publishing in trade journals are seldom rewarded within academia. So why would one do these--at least within the context of extrinsic motivation.

Demands on time; "do more with less." As in many segments of society today, academia is being confronted with getting more done with less. As faculty members retire (a common occurrence within higher education today), they are not replaced, or they are replaced with contract employees. Movement toward revenue-centered management has increased pressures on such things as student credit hours and numbers of graduates. Workloads are increasing with no additional resources to get things done. Within this context, senior professors--those who have tenure and have reached the end of the promotion line, and who can earn more in one day's consulting than the institution can possibly reward them with an annual pay increase--may no longer buy into doing research. Thus, after serving their apprenticeship, those who should be best positioned to influence practice through research often become practitioners in their own ways.

Multiple missions mean none is done well. Most universities have moved to adopt the three-fold mission of the land-grant university: research, teaching, and service. Yet, this is often done without the use of differential staffing. Thus, every faculty member is expected to be at least adequate in all three. Those expert in one, adequate in one, and inadequate in one are no longer likely to last long within the university. Traditionally, it was possible for outstanding researchers to be so successful in grant awards that they could buy themselves out of teaching and gain tenure based on their research. Today, with the expectation of excellence in all three areas, it has become very difficult to do well in any of the three, especially if one wants a life at all outside the academy.

Funding for HRD research is sparse. Successful fields in academic research are largely funded by government agencies, especially through NSF, USIA, USAID, World Bank, UN agencies, defense agencies, even the Department of Education. Fields that attract significant funding from corporations are those that can provide them with products (and very occasionally) services that can be marketed. HRD doesn't fit into any of these areas neatly. And when they do gain funding, it is more likely to be for development than for research. Thus, the research that is done tends to be "out of one's hide," and, therefore, scope and paradigm are chosen based on limited resources rather than what is needed.

Research by non-academicians is not rewarded, and theory is disparaged. Those outside of academia who aspire to doing research are confronted with almost the opposite of what has just been described. Consultants and practitioners receive no rewards, typically, for doing research, and if they do conduct research, they have to be careful that their results do not shed bad light on their products or services. The "Business Contexts" section will expand further on the problems associated with practitioners doing research.

If academia can't get its act together, why should anyone listen to anything that comes out of academia? Universities, especially large universities, are notoriously poor in their own HRD practices. Roland Sullivan, an external OD consultant, put it this way:

> Much of the academic world (i.e., the state of higher education) is seen as not being relevant in today's world. If you can not get your HRD practices to be effective in your systems, then your credibility is weakened.

Is there an institution of higher education out there that does not need a huge dose of our own best practices? There are none of which I am aware!

HRD Researchers The researcher does not exist separate from his or her context. Thus, each of the items above will impact the researcher in ways that negatively affect how practice is influenced by research. Further, however, there are factors resident with the researcher that also limit the ways in which practice is influenced by research.

Get it done--for tenure, promotion, pay. Consistent with the organizational reward systems, the professorial motive for doing research is seldom to change practice. It is to achieve the rewards offered by the institution. And within research academia today, research--traditional, scholarly inquiry--is still the most important criterion for tenure, promotion, and pay. This leads to the next point.

Quantity vs. quality. Quality, then, becomes important as measured by the acceptance of articles in refereed journals. It is not based on its importance to the business world (especially if our colleagues happen to be in education or psychology or speech communications or adult education, rather than business). The goal of the researcher, then, becomes one of accumulating large numbers of published but refereed journal articles. And this leads, naturally, to the next point.

Write for colleagues, not for business. The way one gets published in refereed journals is to meet the criteria of the research establishment, based largely on tradition. Those criteria almost always ensure that our writing will not be read or understood within the business context. And once published, one's research is read by tenure, promotion, or review committees, who apply the same criteria. The cycle continues; researchers write for researchers, and their writings are ignored by business.

Research results often appear to be biased. Barbara Butts Williams, Leadership Development Officer at the St. Paul Companies, commented: "Too often, only successes are cited in academic research. Practitioners understand that...mistakes and failures will occur; we want to hear about the lessons learned from the difficulties experienced." I recall the amazement of my colleagues when I had an article published in a refereed journal in which we shared experiences related to a failed OD intervention (Johansen & McLean, 1995).

Obfuscation. When I asked one of my colleagues what he thought the problem was, he said, "Researchers obfuscate ubiquitously in their writing." And he said it with a straight face. There are times when I read a manuscript submitted to the *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, and I say to myself, "What was that article about?" Now, I understand research, and I know the jargon, and I know the paradigms, and I'm liberally educated, and steeped in business theory and practice--and I still don't get it! Consider these titles from last year's *HRDQ* (and I could have used almost all of the titles):

> Learning self-direction in a social and experiential context
>
> Boundary management in action reflection learning™ research: Taking the role of a sophisticated barbarian
>
> Self-directed learning readiness and occupational categories

A manager of management development of a Fortune 100 company said, "If you can't say it in five bullets, then it's not worth saying in the minds of many business people." Is there any wonder why our business colleagues complain about the way in which we write?

No or outdated knowledge of the workplace. While this may or may not be a valid observation, it is certainly one that is widely shared within the business community. They look at the topics we research, or the way in which we do our research, and the recommendations we make, and they are convinced that we don't understand the workplace. They wonder how we can, especially if we don't have extensive business experience and aren't currently involved in a consulting practice that takes us into businesses. They also worry about how much of our research is primarily driven by students whom they perceive to be even more naive relative to the work world..

Research preparation in fields other than HRD. Given the relative infancy of HRD, many of us who are doing research in HRD come from fields other than HRD. Many of us come out of some content field in education--my own background is in business education--but others come from adult education, psychology, organizational behavior, speech communications, sociology, health or public administration, economics, and on and on the list goes. There is a freedom in this, in that we are able to bring a fresh perspective to our research. But the downside is that we don't build well on what has gone before because we may not even know or understand

well what that is. We may also not be well grounded in what the field needs, so our research may not "hit the mark" from a business perspective.

Work within the silo of their discipline. Another problem that we face as a field is the breadth of the foundational areas that exist within HRD. We are truly prisoners of our silos, especially when we come out of an academic context in which specialization is the goal, rather than generalization. But a systems perspective within the business community requires a broad perspective. Answers within silos don't speak very well to systems-wide issues. (This issue, of course, is also a major problem within organizational contexts.)

Dissemination Another of the major factors contributing to incongruence between research and business needs is the way in which research is disseminated. Five, of many forms of dissemination, are explored below.

Scholarly journals. Most of our research is targeted toward scholarly--preferably refereed--journals, unless one thinks that there is a possibility of getting into the *Harvard Business Review*. But, if we want to impact what goes on in business, this is not a very productive outlet. Few practitioners will bother to read such journals, and those who do may quickly give up in disgust over the lack of relevance to their world. Consider that scholarly journals

- are designed to meet the needs of academia.
- have editors, reviewers, and board members who are academics (and, therefore, traditional).
- are proliferating rapidly, with small circulations, clearly designed to provide outlets for researchers, not to meet the demands of practitioners for research.
- use dull layouts and graphics.

There is nothing here that will encourage academics to write for the business community nor to encourage business practitioners to learn about and implement the findings of research.

Trade journals. Forbes and *The Wall Street Journal* are examples of two journals that dominate the business community; within human resource development, we would look to *Training* and *Training and Development* as the two dominating trade journals. Such journals do not typically ask, How can we put forward the best practices identified in research for our readers? Rather, questions that are more likely to be heard are:

- What will sell?
- What's "hot" today?
- How can I write an article to market my services?
- Can't that be written more simply?
- What haven't we written about lately?

These are not the questions that are likely to push authors to rely on research nor for publishers to seek out academic research.

If there is any question about whether trade or scholarly journals predominate, consider the 1996 circulation figures in Table 1 (Braun & Dow, 1997; *Ulrich's...*, 1997).. Note the huge differences between trade and scholarly journals:

Table 1
Circulation of Trade and Academic Journals, as of mid-1996

Trade Journal	Circulation	Scholarly Journal	Circulation
Training	50,000	HRDQ	1,765
Training and Development	35,229	Academy of Management Review	11,500
Forbes	779,000	Performance Improvement Qtrly	Not listed
Harvard Business Review	212,576	Group and Team Effectiveness Journal	Not listed
Personnel Journal	29,004	Consultation	Not listed
Management Review	67,000	Human Systems Journal	Not listed
Wall Street Journal	1,013,000	OD Journal	Not listed

Is there any question which journals are most impacting practice? Most of the scholarly journals checked are not even considered to be important enough to list!

Conferences. Another source of dissemination is papers at academic conferences, such as we will experience here, or at other conferences, such as the Academy of Management, American Educational Research Association, and the International Management Development Association. As with journals, we also have a continuum of conferences, including the ASTD International Conference and Training's national conferences. As with the journals, there are problems with both types of conferences. At the academic conferences, except here, of course, one is likely to hear the following statements from attendees:

- "Hey, we can read! You don't need to read to us!"
- "Don't I get a chance to say something?"
- "What does this have to do with anything?" Or, as my father used to say, "What does this have to do with the price of beans in Boston?"
- "Huh? What did he/she say? Multiscaled discriminate analysis?

At practitioner conferences, we are likely to hear:

- "Practitioners aren't interested in research"--even though almost 400 showed up at last year's ASTD conference to hear a presentation on the implications for practice of research on 360-degree feedback (McLean, 1996).
- "What can I do tomorrow when I return to my job?"
- "Entertain me!"
- "I've only been on the job for six months; I don't know what you're talking about."

Note the absence of any request for a research base or best practices based on the research.

Electronic media. Increasingly, academics and practitioners are turning to various types of electronic media for their information, primarily those associated with the internet but perhaps also including CD-ROMs, intranets, teleconferencing, and so on. But do these new media solve the communication problems between researchers and practitioners? Not likely. Researchers ask:

- "How does this fit into my reward system; does it count?" Even if the online journal is refereed, there is fear that the non-traditional nature of the "publication" will exclude it from the traditional reward mechanisms.
- "Given the nature of electronic media and the failure of the copyright laws to keep up, how can I be assured that there will be adequate protection of my intellectual property?"
- "Why should I give away my expertise when companies will pay for it?"

At the same time, practitioners ask:

- "How will I know if I can believe the information on-line?" (or, in research terms, is the information valid?)
- "I'm already overloaded with the number of e-mail messages I get a day; how can I deal with all of the information out there?"
- "If they don't write any differently online than they do in those darn journals, how can I understand what's online?"

Academics consulting. Many academics also consult, a factor of the pay systems in most of their organizational contexts! On the surface, this would appear to be the ideal way in which to transfer research findings into the business world. In reality, it doesn't seem to change much.

- Most businesses are seeking consultants because of their **business** expertise, not **research** expertise. And so the academics have to conform or they won't have business.
- Academics who are consulting might well have to ask, "What hat do I have on now?" Behavior that works in one context may not transfer well to the other context.
- Clearly there is the temptation to be a chameleon; when in Rome, do as the Romans do. Again, the marketplace that doesn't value research may well control the behavior of the academics when in business. And the research gets left in academia.

Teaching. Since most of us in higher education also teach, and since many of our students are current practitioners, one might also guess that teaching would be an ideal way to change practice to be consistent with research. Again, this doesn't always happen.

- Research interests may not be aligned with teaching assignments.
- Textbooks may not have a research base.
- Students may not be interested in research; and with student evaluations increasing in importance within higher education reward systems, faculty may well deliver what they perceive students to want.
- Faculty may not be well versed in research outside of their area of expertise.

Business Context As we move to considering the consuming end of the system, we move to the context in which the research is intended ultimately to be transferred. The culture of that context will determine, to a large extent, how much the research will impact business practice.

Get it done - NOW! Of all the responses received to the open-ended question, this was most frequently stated. Business is now operating in cybertime. Roland Sullivan, quoted earlier, stated: "Change is happening so fast out here now that, by the time the research gets published (years), the best practice researched has evolved through real-time intuitive research, or the practice no longer fits the need." This is closely tied to the second problem.

Don't bother us; we don't have time. This complaint has dual impact. First, it means that businesses don't have time to work with researchers to provide them with a "real" laboratory in which to conduct their research. Second, if the research results aren't easily accessed, when needed, in language that is easily understood, then the business world doesn't have the time to seek it out in all of the convoluted ways in which we do research. Think about what it takes for us as researchers to conduct a review of the literature. Is this an easy task (even with computers)? Is it something that can be done in an hour or two so we have a good synthesis? Obviously, the answer is a resounding NO!

But we're different. Here's the age-old refrain. "It might work in Company A, but it won't work here; we're different." And so the research, the theory, the model building, core principles can all be dismissed--"because we're different." Of course, every organization is unique. And our research paradigms are moving away from paradigms in which generalizability is the desired end. So those raising this refrain are increasingly reinforced in their belief.

Perception of academics as living in the "ivory tower." The business world **knows** that academicians are out of touch and don't understand the business world. After all, if they understood, then their writing wouldn't be so theoretical. It would be more practical, down to earth, and implementable.

Theory doesn't work; not practical. Following directly out of the previous point, if academicians don't know about the business world, then obviously any theories they develop can't work.

Confidentiality is critical. Businesses might well say: "We live in a competitive world. If we do allow academicians into our workplace, then they'll write about us. If they do that, our competition will find out about us and beat us at our own game. Further, they'll pick up on all of our weaknesses and foibles, exposing our vulnerabilities. We can't afford to have that happen." And, as a result, again, researchers are excluded from the business place. Falling back on college students as our subjects, our results don't apply as well as they could have with a larger and different sample, and business again says that research is not practical.

Change is difficult. Even if business knows that it can do things better, it often resists because of the difficulty and time involved in creating change. Businesses still function according to the "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" syndrome, in spite of the quality movement that has raised serious questions about the ability of such businesses to remain productive and competitive. According to Druckman and Bjork (1994), the difficulty of changing organizational culture may be the greatest impediment to bringing about change, even when everyone knows that the change is for the best. As they stated,

> what has become apparent to us is that specifying the techniques and innovations that do and do not have the potential to enhance individual and team performance is only part of the battle. Without an organizational culture that fosters the changes needed to implement those innovations, proposals for

> change, however credible their source or convincing the evidence, will have little effect. (p. 295)

The ethical approach isn't necessarily the profitable approach. A consultant in a large consulting firm told me,

> We know that re-engineering isn't what our clients need. We have an alternative approach that we know will work better. But so long as clients keep buying our re-engineering service, we'll keep selling it. That's easier than putting a new service in place and makes more money in the short term.

I asked that same consultant about evaluation of his company's services. He said,

> We never go back to our previous clients to find out how our services are meeting the clients' needs. We're afraid that, if we ask them, they'll tell us that it's not working, and then we'll have to do something about it, not only for them, but for our other clients. If we don't know, then we don't have to do anything.

This is another example of companies being driven by the short-term bottom line. Even when the research is known, and best practices of research agree with the understood best practices of business, there is no guarantee that those best practices will be used.

HRD Practitioners Finally, we explore the situation for those to whom we look for specific implementation of our research. Just as researchers are heavily influenced by their workplace context, so, too, are HRD practitioners impacted by their workplace, as described in the preceding section. In addition, they reflect the following concerns.

It's not understandable. The research literature is full of jargon and technical language. It is written by people who, typically, have a minimum of 21 years of education! They typically have a pretty good vocabulary, and they tend not to be bashful in using it. How well does such writing communicate to the line operator who has been moved into a trainer role because he/she is an expert operator? The operator may well have no more than a high school education. Unless written for such a person, the writing level is probably not going to be appropriate.

Research articles are boring. Research articles are written in a sameness that every one of us who does research can cite: problem statement early in the study, significance of the study, specific research questions, definitions, review of the literature, methodology, findings, discussion, recommendations, and conclusion. Doesn't that sound familiar? But does it sound interesting? Of course not.

Where do we find it? Can you tell me one source you would go to if you wanted to find out about best practices, based on research, in evaluating training? How about in defining the conditions for maximizing transfer of training? How effective is CQI? The reality is that there is no one source. Even an extended review of the literature doesn't give us simple answers to these complex questions.

Hurry, hurry, hurry. Just as the speed of doing business is increasing, and as researchers are being asked to do more with less, so also are practitioners being asked to do more with less. Not only do they not have time to discover the best practices according to research, but, if they find that what they are doing is not consistent with the research, then they don't have time to rewrite the training, or redo the policy, or create a different intervention. So it's easier to say, "What we're using is working just fine. We don't have time to try something that might not work as well."

Change is difficult. Just as changing organizational culture is difficult, so, too, is it difficult to change individual behavior. Looking again at school-based research, Huberman (1993) noted: "If the innovation literature teaches us just one thing, it is that practice change is an uneven, uncertain affair that seldom transcends trivial levels..." (p. 25).

A threatened self-concept may get in the way. A CEO of a large non-profit has been carrying on an e-mail conversation with me because his board is wanting to use 360-degree feedback to determine which volunteers to fire. He admitted that he did not know any of the research on 360-degree feedback nor did he know where to find it. Further, though, he observed that "most people ignore research because research points out the warts, and most people don't want to be reminded of their blemishes."

How Can the Situation be Improved?

The problems outlined above are not unique to the research-business connection in human resource development. It probably exists in most aspects/functions of business, and it is a problem that is certainly well known in the research-school communication in education. Cooke et al. (1993), for example, concluded that

> we need to find better ways of translating the results of research into more effective practice and of training teachers to access, interpret, and research in ways that will allow them to incorporate findings into their unique settings. (p. 319)

Research Context

Increased partnerships with businesses. As government funding decreases, it is being replaced by an influx of research funding from businesses. Not only does this ensure continuing funding for academic research, but it also suggests a closer tie between the focus of academic research and the needs of business, increasing the probability of implementation. This doesn't solve all of the problems, of course, as it opens up possibility for conflict of interest among all parties involved--the researcher, the university, and the business (Zolla-Pazner, 1994).

Differential staffing, which is within the control of most universities, would allow a commitment to research. While some faculty will still choose multiple roles, those who have expertise in research could dedicate more of their workload to that area.

Creative funding approaches will enhance funding available for HRD research. At the University of Minnesota, for example, we have tied research to our internship program. Companies working with our interns provide grants to the University that include a 20% overhead that goes to our Human Resource Development Research Center to fund research. While it hasn't provided million dollar grants, it has allowed for a significant amount of ongoing research.

Include dissemination in the reward structure. This may be a hard sell because most reward systems are systems-wide. However, some departments are allowed to create their own criteria or at least apply their own weights to the criteria. Such an approach could reward those who choose editor roles and those who are able to write in such a way as to bridge the research-practice gulf.

HRD Researchers

Professional organizations, both scholarly and practice, have a responsibility to create bridging opportunities. Conferences could well focus, either in part or in whole, on the question of transitioning research to practice. They could sponsor journals with the specific purpose of creating such a bridge; this is the mission of the newly launched *Human Resource Development International*, the new journal to be published by Routledge with AHRD as one of its three sponsors. Swanson's vision for this journal is that it will become the *Harvard Business Review* for HRD. This is a worthy goal that will move the field forward in both research and practice. They could hold conferences in which practitioners can help researchers understand what is important to them in their business contexts.

A monograph published by the Academy with suggestions for journal outlets, along with their criteria and formats, would aid researchers in seeking multiple outlets for their research written very differently for different audiences. Cathy Sleezer has done some preliminary research identifying major outlets for research in the field of HRD. If this could be carried to the next step, I believe it would go a long way to bridging the publication gap and provide researchers with additional citations for their resumes.

As the use of the internet matures, criteria will be established to protect intellectual property and provide checks on validity that will ultimately allow researchers to claim such publications as refereed.

The emergence of multi-disciplinary programs, conferences, professional organizations, and journals will provide researchers with many more opportunities to bridge the communication gap in ways that will reward them in traditional ways

Researchers need remediation in writing. Another task that professional organizations can undertake in their conferences is to offer workshops in writing for understanding and implementation. Gersten and Brengelman (1996) found that

> to be useful, research must be able to be translated into manageable and comprehensible ...strategies and procedures. Further, these strategies must reflect and fit within the *details of day-to-day...instruction.* (p. 68)

This style of writing can be taught and researchers can learn to change how they write so practice can, in fact, be impacted.

Dissemination

Journals that bridge the theory-to-practice gap will improve dissemination.

Research translation columns in popular trade journals will also help.

Partnering of authorships and editorships between practitioners and researchers will allow each to serve as a check on the other to ensure quality research that communicates easily to practitioners.

Electronic media will allow interactive, real-time conversations to improve communication between researchers and practitioners.

Electronic media will also require researchers and practitioners to take a broader global perspective.

Listservs for dissemination of research should be established with tight controls, such as a webmaster functioning as an editor would function, to ensure a "Seal of Good Housekeeping" and confidence that the information is sound.

Consult with integrity. This was the focus of last year's conference. As academicians, we are in the best possible position to turn down assignments that run counter to research's best practices. We don't rely solely on our consulting income to survive as many consultants do. We have our base salaries and our benefits from our universities. We can make a difference if we are willing to stand up to bad practice and consult with integrity.

Journal articles could require a capsule summary for action. An internal HRD consultant in a Fortune 100 company suggested that research articles should have "presentation-ready visuals" that could be used immediately in the workplace. But don't hold your breath on this one. Kaestle (1993) cited the example of a US Department of Education (1986) publication that summarized best practices for classroom instruction based on a summary of exhaustive research and validation. It summarized 41 practices in a widely disseminated publication. It had almost no impact. The conclusion was that "the print and the dissemination media, no matter how skillfully done, won't work" (p. 27).

Business Context I find this category the most difficult in which to make recommendations for change.

Use cost-benefit analysis. If businesses are driven by the bottom-line, then HRD and HRD researchers must be prepared to present best practices from research in dollar terms. We have the tools; we just don't use them often enough.

If you can't fight 'em, join 'em. Peter Senge (1990) did a real service to HRD with his publication of *The Fifth Discipline*. He was able to take complex theoretical issues and put them before business people in a way that got their attention. Why aren't more of us in this field writing such books that don't rely solely on a fad but that are based on sound theory and research?

HRD Practitioners

Provide practitioners with coursework in research. For classroom teachers, Cooke et al. (1993) found that their research attitudes were positively affected by

> (a) coursework in a related area (e.g., educational research, applied behavior analysis), (b) previously conducted research, and (c) completion of an advanced degree (i.e., master's level or above). (p. 326)

There is no reason to assume that the same wouldn't be true for HRD practitioners. As the field matures, we are seeing the master's degree becoming the degree of choice for people who are committing their careers to HRD. With that, should come increased acceptance of research and its application.

Include research in individual development plans. This is similar to the above, yet is more individually focused than programmatically focused.

Get them at our scholarly conferences where we can interact and learn from each other. Of all suggestions in this section, if we could get this to happen, we'd start to see a real change in the transfer of research to the workplace.

Conclusion

The gap between research and practice will not be closed easily nor quickly. However, there are enough pieces that are "broken" that major improvement can occur with relatively small investments. Systemically, we are facing a very long-term "fix." But as with anything for which there is a true commitment, the time to begin the long-term fix is now. As a professional organization and as members of a profession, there is much that we can do, starting with this conference, that will move us in the right direction. Let's begin to cross that bridge so we will see our research have real impact in those organizations that have an HRD function--and are there any that don't?

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